

A
P E T I T I O N
 FROM THE
C O U N T R Y,
 To the Honourable
House of Commons,
 CONCERNING THE
T O L E R A T I O N.

Our Worthy Representatives,

HAVING long Meditated on the Dreadful Calamities, which threaten this Kingdom by those Unhappy Divisions amongst us: We thought it our Duty to Communicate the best of our Thoughts to this *Honourable House*: (the Fountain of Power and Redress) towards the preventing such Dismal Consequences: In doing of which, We crave leave to Premise these following Assertions, which Experience and Observation seem to have Establish'd, *viz.*

I. That though it is Necessary *in Theory*, yet it is Generally True *in Practice*, That where there is Difference in Opinion, as to Religious Matters, there will be Difference in Affection.

II. That every Party is Ambitious of Civil Power, and would Rule Paramount if they could.

III. That where the Civil Power is in the Hands of Different Parties, there will be continual Struggles and Conflicts, tending to the Ruine of each other, and the Subversion of any Government.

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These few Undeniable Propositions, and the Consequences that may fairly be Deduced from them, plainly prove, That We in *England*, do most Unwisely recede from the Politicks of our Neighbouring Nations, by putting the Sword into the Hands of every Enthusiast, and encouraging each Party to Undermine the Settlement Establish'd.

Our Neighbours and Allies in *Holland*, admit none into Publick Trust, but such as profess the Religion of the State : And our *English* Parliament, Stat. 2. 13. Carol. 2. cap. 1. Enacted, *That none shall bear any Office of Magistracy, or other Employment concerning the Government of Cities, Corporations, &c. not having within a Year before their Election Receiv'd the Sacrament according to the Rites of the Church of England, &c.*

This they thought was a sufficient Expedient to keep all such out of the Government, that were not of the National Church ; and indeed, that great and solemn Act of Communion with us, seem'd to be an Effectual Bar at least to a Tender Conscience : But now we have to do with a sort of Persons that can Prevaricate with God and Man, that can be Orthodox upon Occasion, and Trifle with all that is Sacred, to Qualifie themselves for an Office.

Thus we frequently see those that have Deserted our Communion for many Years, as if Conscious of their Hypocrisie, stealing a Qualification from some distant Altar : A sort of Men that always act with Conformity to their Interests, and never fail to Comply when it will serve the Party. Therefore tho' Our Opinion is, That no Man's Conscience ought to be forc'd in Matters purely Religious ; and that *Toleration* is a just Debt to those Tender Consciences, which after due Information, are Really and Sincerely so ; yet our Petition is, *That this Toleration may be so far Limited, as not to Exchange, or Offend Our Establishments.*

This We in all Humility leave to the Profound Wisdom of this Great and Judicious Assembly, begging leave to Hint, That perhaps it may be thought advisable to Explain the ~~prementioned~~ Act, 13 Car. 2. and Enacting, *That if any Person be found Present in, or Joyning with any Dissenting Conventicle, and be duly Convicted thereof, his Place, or Office, shall be immediately Void.*

Hence it will probably happen, that many that have Deserted Our Church, will be constant to us ; many and great Disturbances in Corporations cease ; Divisions and Party-making be discountenanc'd : And since Places of Trust are generally rather an Expence and Trouble than Advantage to any but Knaves, the truly Conscientious will not be Offended at such an Act.

These with all Submission, are our present Sentiments ; and as this Parliament seems to be of a Temper particularly suited to our present Establishments, so We cannot but promise our selves a Happy Result of Your Councils.

For which you have the Heartly Prayers of your Humble Petitioners,

Decemb. 15.
1699.

A. B.
C. D.
E. F. &c.

